Selling Safer Sex

Code of Condom

Prior to the advent of AIDS, condoms were marketed to heterosexual men and used primarily to prevent conception and secondarily, to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. By the 1970s, with increased use of the birth control pill and intrauterine devices (IUD), and with access to antibiotics to cure syphilis and other sexually transmitted disease, condom sales decreased – "between 1965 and 1970, condom use declined 22 percent. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, U.S. condom sales fell by half."

In the early-1980s, as it became clear that HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) was transmitted through semen and blood, health care and AIDS organizations, began to stress condom use – "Wearing a condom may reduced the risk of transmitting diseases between partners" – for safer sex to gay men.



Advocate condom and condom accessary ads dating from 1983''s "Man to Man" to 1988's "Tender Box."

Condom advertising was generally relegated to the classified section of The *Advocate* during the 1980s. Only a few full-page color ads appeared such as the 1988 Okamoto ad.

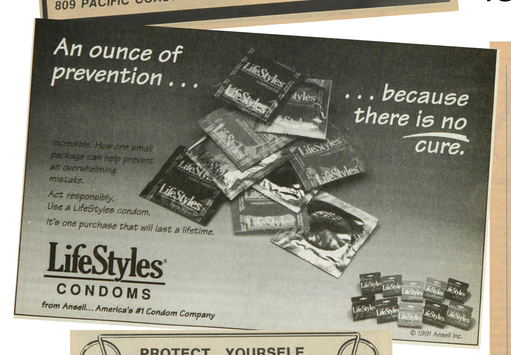
> *"For gay men in particular, the answer to the epidemic, our 'magic bullet,' is the condom, a thin layer of latex to shield us from infection and death."*
>
> *Chambers, David L. "Gay Men, AIDS, and the Code of the Condom." Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, 1994.*

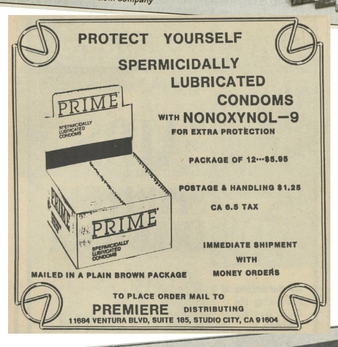
The Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in 1986 spurred condom sales. "Between 1986 and 1988, sales of all latex condoms increased 25 percent (226.1 to 283.4 million). The biggest percentage growth was in latex condoms with spermicide which increased 116 percent (23.2 to 50.1 million)." The president of the world's largest condom manufacturer called AIDS "a condom marketer's dream" in a 1986 *New York Times* article ("State's Condom Makers Enjoying a Sales Boom").



The subtle 1992 advertisement by AmFAR (American Foundation for AIDS Research) and this 1987 LifeStyles that ran in *Cosmopolitan* is an example of condom advertising aimed at women

> *"The gay community, with its infinite capacity to make oppression bearable through fetishization, is attempting to invest the humble rubber with erotic cachet."*
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> *Goldstein, R. "Rubber Soul: The Condom Makes a Comeback." The Village Voice, 1986*









1987 ad for the Safe Connection pendant signaled the wearer's commitment to safer sex through condom use.



By the 1990s, the great majority of public health posters "directed at gay men about being safe explicitly mention 'condoms' or 'rubbers' or allude to their use. Many now show a condom or a condom packet. The condom has become a generic symbol of sexual health and safety, as well as an allusion to and a directive about a particular sexual act. In fact, posters and other advice commonly reduce safety to a single notion: always use a condom for anal intercourse."



Northwest AIDS Foundation advertisement touting condoms, date unknown. Wellcome Collection.

Quote from: Chambers, David L. "Gay Men, AIDS, and the Code of the Condom." Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, vol. 29, no. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 353-386.